

Our Greatest Artistic Accomplishment

Great things are rarely easily achieved. Such is the case of Miami-Dade County's new Carnival Center for the Performing Arts which opens its doors this month, and in so doing, ushers in a whole new cultural era in South Florida.

It is a massive public-private partnership that took five years and \$450 million to build – and there were many periods of tough going when opening night, now set for Oct. 5, seemed far off. But thanks to an unwavering desire to succeed and the dedication of a great many people the curtain will go up.

Was it hard? Absolutely. Did it take a long time to build? That depends on your perspective. Looking back a decade from now, the Center will surely be viewed as the most complex and challenging building project ever attempted in South Florida. Maybe, in the entire Southeast.

When I became county manager three years ago, the project was quite honestly in disarray. Architects, builders, 72 subcontractors, consultants and oversight teams were feuding, delays were seemingly never-ending and threats of litigation were cast about. Obviously, a different approach was needed. A new county team took control. We rolled up our sleeves, put an end to the turf wars and focused on getting all parties to work together to get the job done.

We set a firm date for completion – Aug. 5, 2006. Last month we met that deadline, to the day, and the building received its certificate to open. Today, one only has to walk through the Center's two magnificent halls to know we have built something great – a truly remarkable place that will come to define the heart and soul of our community. I truly believe that the Carnival Center will be viewed by the world as one of Miami's premier landmarks, a place like no other for which we can all be proud.

I also believe that the Center will prove to be a wise investment. Already we have seen significant commercial investment in the Omni area. A once desolate strip of downtown is now brimming with activity. Families are moving

back to downtown Miami, and once forgotten neighborhoods are coming back to life with new shops and restaurants opening regularly. The Center has already created hundreds of new jobs and has the potential to create many more.

It is important to remember that the public monies that went into construction of the Center were generated primarily from tourist tax revenues – not from local taxpayers – and, in turn, we expect an important boost to tourism, Miami-Dade's number one industry. This Center is important to the economic vitality of our entire region.

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The successful completion of this project is the result of a tremendous cooperative effort. It is without question one of the largest, and most ambitious, public-private efforts undertaken in our community. A great deal of thanks needs to be given to all of the County mayors, commissioners and managers who have supported this project since its inception. Our private sector partners including the Performing Arts Center Trust, led by Parker Thomson, chairman of its board of directors, and the Performing Arts Center Foundation, chaired by Sherwood M. Weiser. Both of these extraordinary volunteers have remained dedicated and persevered despite the many challenges along the way.

Certainly, the Center would not be possible without private donations, including multimillion-dollar gifts from the Carnival Corporation and the John

S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Thanks go to Carnival Center CEO and President Michael Hardy, Performing Arts Center Construction Committee members and the City of Miami and its Omni Community Redevelopment Agency. Also to be congratulated are the members of the County's Cultural Affairs Council along with other community groups that provided support throughout the years.

There have been so many people involved in this project it is hard to recognize them all, but a special mention should go to Assistant County Manager Bill Johnson and Construction Director Ron Austin who put in countless hours to ensure a successful opening.

The highly anticipated Grand Opening Weekend takes place October 5-8. A free all-day event, Target Global Beat, on Oct. 8, will feature performances from the Center's four resident companies – the Concert Association of Florida, Florida Grand Opera, Miami City Ballet and New World Symphony. This will be a very special day for our community – join the celebration and help make history.

Beyond the opening events, the Carnival Center has an exciting and diverse opening season with entertainment for all tastes – ranging from Broadway theater to jazz and pop music stars. I encourage everyone to experience the wonder and magic of music, theater and dance in their new performing arts center.

When a community comes together, great things can be achieved. The Carnival Center is a tremendous accomplishment for Miami-Dade County.



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The observations expressed in this column represent the opinion of the writer, and not necessarily that of Miami Monthly.